

**Outcomes from institutional audit**  
**Work-based and placement learning,**  
**and employability**  
**Second series**



**Sharing good practice**

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### Summary

Consideration of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 shows widespread engagement with work-based and placement learning and the introduction of employability skills into the curriculum. The reported level of engagement with work-based learning ranges from giving 'strong encouragement' to students to organise their own placements, to instances where a placement year or work-based module is mandatory for all undergraduates. Some audit reports show some institutions making innovative use of their local and regional links.

A significant proportion of the audit reports comment on arrangements made to ensure that students are well supported when engaging with work-based learning. Support mechanisms include visits from placement tutors, pre-placement induction and post-placement support. Use is made of virtual learning environments to facilitate contact with those on placement.

It is clear from the reports that an increasing focus is being placed on ensuring that students have the opportunity to acquire a range of transferable skills relevant to employers as part of their courses. Employability skills are embedded in provision or offered via workshops often run by an institution's careers service.

Section 9 of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* is concerned with placements, and a number of reports note explicitly the steps the institution has taken to ensure that its policies and practices are in alignment with this section.

In ensuring the quality and standard of work-based learning, some institutions make special arrangements for scrutiny of such provision in their approval, monitoring and review processes. This may include seeking feedback from both employers and students about their experience and, in some cases, review of relevant service departments or cross-institutional review around a theme such as placements.

A small number of reports consider the assessment of work-based learning. They give examples of the approaches taken and the means adopted for including summative assessment of work-based learning in calculating the final award. The need to facilitate external examiners' access to the workplace is also noted.

Of the features of good practice cited in the audit reports, several describe arrangements for placements, with a particular emphasis on the support provided to students. Others relate to opportunities for developing employability skills. In several reports, institutions are recommended to ensure institution-wide consistency of practice in this area.

### Preface

An objective of institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning'. To provide institutions and other stakeholders with access to timely information on the findings of its institutional audits, QAA produces short working papers that describe features of good practice and summarise recommendations from the audit reports. Since 2005 these have been published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit* (hereafter, *Outcomes...*). The first series of these papers drew on the findings of audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004. This paper is based on the findings of 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006.

A feature of good practice in institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, in the context of the particular institution, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the Main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraphs 5-7, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each institutional audit report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the Main report. Throughout the body of this paper, references to features of good practice in the institutional audit reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the Main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics identified for this second series of *Outcomes...* papers can be found at Appendix 3 (page 15).

As noted above, this second series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 59 institutional audit reports published by August 2006, and the titles of papers are in most cases the same as their counterparts in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers. Like the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, those in the second series are perhaps best seen as 'work in progress'. Although QAA retains copyright in the contents of the *Outcomes...* papers, they can be freely downloaded from the QAA website and cited, with acknowledgement for research and educational purposes.

## Introduction and general overview

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 (see Appendix 1, page 11). It follows a similarly titled paper based on the 70 audit reports published up to November 2004. A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this second *Outcomes...* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 17).

2 In institutional audit, the principal source of information for the audit team was the self-evaluation document. In this, the institution participating in the audit provided a reflective, self-critical view of its mission and the policies and procedures employed to achieve it while ensuring the quality of the learning experience of its students and the standard of their awards. The self-evaluation document, together with the supporting information on which it drew (which was shared with the audit team), and the QAA template against which the report of the audit was constructed, set the parameters for the institutional audit report.

3 The template did not make specific reference to work-based or placement learning. But where such learning formed a significant part of an institution's provision (often when it had a large number of vocationally oriented courses), the ways in which it was set up, managed and assessed were key to the experience of the students involved and the standards of their awards. Hence such learning featured in a number of audit reports. Special arrangements for the support of work-based learners were also noted in some cases. Further, Section 9 of QAA's *Code of practice* is concerned with placements, and some reports, in considering the use the institution made of the Academic Infrastructure, referred explicitly to alignment with this section.

4 As in the corresponding paper in the first series of *Outcomes...*, the definition of work-based learning used in this paper is that offered by Seagraves et al (1996) (cited at [www.uwe.ac.uk/wbl/define.shtml](http://www.uwe.ac.uk/wbl/define.shtml)). This definition suggests that the term work-based learning 'reflects a range of learning activities that are embedded in academic programmes and take place in a workplace'. It also suggests that usage of the term can encompass approaches which range from 'experiences with clear objectives and outcomes related to improving application of theory to practice and vice versa, to enhancing core and key competencies related to the subject area, and improving employability' (Seagraves et al). Thus this paper covers not only placement activity, but also the use made of work-based learning in Foundation Degrees and the development of employability skills within the curriculum.

## Features of good practice

5 Consideration of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 shows one feature of good practice relating to work-based learning in general:

- the Learning Through Work Scheme and its reflective approach to this innovative area of practice [University of Derby, paragraph 294, bullet 5; paragraph 153].

6 The audit reports noted good practice more frequently regarding opportunities for students to engage with placement learning and the mechanisms for supporting such learning, as in:

- the preparation and pre-placement support of students for the placement/sandwich year [Kingston University, paragraph 237 vii; paragraph 176]
- the well-planned, resourced and supported placement system which adds significantly to the student experience within the University [University of Surrey, paragraph 221, bullet 2; paragraphs 41-2, 62, 77 to 79, 113-4, 150 and 160]
- the support provided for a wide variety of internships offering professional experience to students [American InterContinental University - London, paragraph 217 ii; paragraph 124]
- the way in which industrial placements for students at the College are managed, supported and integrated within the curriculum [Harper Adams University College, paragraph 189 v; paragraphs 73, 88, 113, 116 and 145]
- the organisation of placement activity, and the support for students prior to, during and subsequent to their placements [Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies, paragraph 229 ii; paragraphs 137-8].

7 The reports also contained several features of good practice in relation to developing the employability of students:

- the effectiveness of the SkillsPlus strategy in drawing together policies relating to student academic support, skills development and employability [University of Plymouth, paragraph 244 v; paragraph 121]
- the various institutional and departmental initiatives related to the integration of key and transferable skills into the curriculum [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 245, bullet 7; paragraphs 136 and 164]
- the opportunities for students to participate in collaborative events between affiliates which have improved the student experience and employment prospects [Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraph 134 ii; paragraph 29]
- the high-quality careers service provided for students and recent graduates [University of Manchester, paragraph 211 iv; paragraph 95]
- the commitment to student employability and the embedding of employability skills in the curriculum [University of Westminster, paragraph 241 ii; paragraphs 161 and 171].

### Recommendations

8 Only three formal recommendations in the audit reports related to work-based learning, placements or employability. They focused on the need for clear and consistent policies for careers guidance and placement support across all parts of the institution. A number of other matters for further consideration were, however, listed in individual reports, while not being linked to recommendations; these are noted in the relevant sections of this paper.

### Themes

9 Grouping the features of good practice, recommendations and more general comments relating to work-based learning (as defined in paragraph 4) in the audit reports suggests the following broad themes:

- opportunities for placements and other forms of work-based learning
- the support of students undertaking work-based learning
- the introduction of employability skills to the curriculum
- following the advice of QAA's *Code of practice* with respect to work-based learning
- approval, monitoring and review of programmes with a work-based learning element
- assessment of work-based learning.

### Opportunities for placements and other forms of work-based learning

10 The audit reports indicated that opportunities for work-based learning in the widest sense were introduced into the curriculum in a number of ways. These ranged from one-year 'sandwich' placements most often found in certain vocational and language degrees, through a number of shorter placements embedded in the academic year (typical of awards in teaching and medicine, nursing and allied professions) to the assessment of learning within an existing job, on which an increasing number of part-time Foundation Degrees were based.

11 The audit reports also showed that certain institutions (or parts of institutions) had a particularly strong commitment to work-based learning. This might be expressed through encouragement at policy or strategy level, substantial student involvement, or description by (part of) an institution of its commitment to work-based learning as a particular strength. In other cases, opportunities to undertake work-based learning were described as 'extensive' or 'applying to many or most undergraduate programmes'. Some institutions went further than this and made work-based modules or placements a part of all their programmes.

12 Foundation Degrees are expected to have an emphasis on learning through work. In general, the audit reports noted this to be the case, with Foundation Degrees having a component of work-based learning. In some cases, however, reports indicated that this should be strengthened. The reports commented on difficulties experienced by institutions when students were not already working in the relevant field, but were taking the qualification to make a change of career direction.

13 The audit reports indicated that opportunities for placements might occur as a result of links with local development agencies or community support centres, within the component parts of a federal institution, or as a means of increasing employer liaison as part of an employability strategy. The institution might find placements by using placement tutors, specialised placement units or industrial advisory panels, or students might find placements themselves. A database might be maintained to assist the process.

14 Difficulties in obtaining placements were occasionally reported, for example, where there was competition between the requirements of initial teacher training awards and other education-based programmes. Innovation in tackling such problems included establishing links with educational endeavours outside the school system, such as charities and not-for-profit/for-profit organisations providing education and training.

15 Good practice in providing opportunities for work-based learning was noted in the following audit reports:

- the Learning Through Work Scheme offered by a group of six institutions led by the University of Derby, which aims to stimulate the demand and extend the provision for learner-managed work-based learning [University of Derby, paragraph 153]
- the opportunities for students to participate in collaborative events with affiliates, which have improved the student experience and employment prospects [Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraph 29]
- the well-planned, resourced and supported placement system, which adds significantly to the student experience within the institution [University of Surrey, paragraphs 41-2, 62, 77 to 79, 113-4, 150 and 160]
- the support provided for a wide variety of internships offering professional experience to students [American Intercontinental University - London, paragraph 124].

### The support of students undertaking work-based learning

16 A large proportion of the audit reports commented on arrangements made to ensure that students were well supported when engaging with work-based learning, and many explicitly noted students' satisfaction with these arrangements. Several institutions expressed an intention that such support should be equivalent to that provided for campus-based students, or recognised the need to maintain a range of guidance, support and supervision policies to reflect the needs of a diverse range of students. Evidence from written submissions and meetings with students suggested that, in some cases, such aspirations were met with varying degrees of success.

17 Support for students on placements was most frequently offered via a specially designated placement tutor or officer who would, in most instances, make a number of visits to the workplace. Some reports noted, however, that not all students were visited in this way. The institutions concerned relied on frequent contact and feedback from students and employers to highlight any problems.

18 Where institutions made extensive use of work-based learning, or there was a desire to increase such provision, special support units had frequently been set up within faculties or schools or centrally within the institution. In some cases, support for students on placements or other forms of work-based learning was also provided via virtual learning environments (including discussion groups to allow students to share experiences), the use of personal development planning tools and specially designed modules. These modules included 'skills profiling' and 'placement search'. One audit report noted an anomalous situation where students who took such a module, and were subsequently unable to find a placement, might 'not be allowed to count this module towards their award'.



19 The audit reports noted that some institutions offered specially tailored induction sessions for placement students, including written preparatory material included in placement-specific or more general course handbooks. Handbooks specifically designed to support placements might also outline the duties and responsibilities of students on placement.

20 The good practice embodied in the Learning through Work Scheme developed by one institution has already been noted. This offered an on-line framework for negotiating a programme of work-based learning [University of Derby, paragraph 153]. The audit reports contained further examples of good practice, in the preparation and pre-placement support of students for the placement/sandwich year at one institution [Kingston University, paragraph 176], and in the way in which industrial placements for students were managed, supported and integrated within the curriculum in another institution [Harper Adams University College, paragraphs 73, 88, 113, 116 and 145]. A further report noted good practice in the organisation of placement activity and in the support available for students prior to, during and subsequent to their placements [Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies, paragraphs 137-8].

21 Other innovations noted within this theme included community support for medical students undertaking community placements, and the provision of a mid-placement seminar to ensure that students were kept in touch with developments in the institution.

22 The audit reports' recommendations and related matters for further consideration focused on the need to develop mechanisms to ensure consistency of practice and to spread good practice in supporting placement and other work-based students within institutions. Support also involved preparing the employer to ensure that the student had an appropriate work experience. Several audit reports suggested that all placement providers should be offered such preparation, even where students arranged their own placement, and that institutions should ensure that those acting as mentors were appropriately prepared and updated.

### **Embedding employability skills in the curriculum**

23 The audit reports noted that institutions were increasingly emphasizing the attention they gave to ensuring that their graduates left with a range of transferable skills relevant to employers. In a number of cases, this had led to the development of employability strategies, frameworks or policies. Where such institutional frameworks or strategies were not in place, several audit reports noted intentions to develop them. In one case, however, a report noted that a new draft employability strategy did not clearly link existing measures to obtain feedback from the (sometimes informal) connections between the institution and its graduates and their employers.

24 The audit reports indicated that employability skills were sometimes developed through specialist workshops or other activities run by careers service departments or 'job shops'. The high-quality careers service provided for students and recent graduates at one institution was noted in the relevant audit report as a feature of good practice [University of Manchester, paragraph 95]. Another report noted that a post of Head of Employability and Careers had been established with the intention of

reflecting efforts to link teaching strategy on employability with the institution's careers advisory service. In another institution, the careers adviser had led a number of events in which 'graduate preparedness for employment and the curriculum' was the theme.

25 Also, rather than separate (possibly optional) workshops, skills might be embedded in the curriculum through programme specifications, the production of skills matrices, or the notion of an 'employability strand' running through some or all years of study. In one case already mentioned (previous paragraph), the good practice extended to embedding employability and career management skills into degree programmes [University of Manchester, paragraphs 95 and 117]. Consideration of such implementation might be addressed as part of approval and periodic review processes.

26 Two audit reports noted instances where activity relevant to developing employability skills had been awarded national recognition as a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Sheffield Hallam University [paragraph 99] and the University of Westminster [paragraph 124]. Another audit report noted that the institution was working to ensure that access to employability skills was available to a wider range of students, including postgraduates, distance learners and those on programmes franchised overseas.

27 Good practice in relation to employability skills was noted in a number of audit reports:

- in the effectiveness of the SkillsPlus strategy in drawing together policies relating to students' academic support, skills development and employability [University of Plymouth, paragraph 121]
- for the various institutional and departmental initiatives related to integrating key and transferable skills into the curriculum [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraphs 136 and 164]
- for commitment to student employability and the embedding of employability skills in the curriculum [University of Westminster, paragraphs 161 and 171].

28 In some cases, recommendations and issues for further consideration focused on the need to formulate a clear, documented policy for career education and guidance, and to ensure an institution-wide approach, making better use of the institution's well-established external links to support employability skills development. In another case, it was suggested that further consideration be given to adopting a more proactive approach to these matters.

### Following the advice of QAA's *Code of practice* with respect to work-based learning

29 Section 9 of QAA's *Code of practice* is concerned with placements as part of learning and teaching. A number of audit reports reflected on the ways in which institutions had endeavoured to seek alignment with this section of the *Code of practice*. In many cases, institutions had checked their procedures and practices against the advice of the *Code*; in others, institutions were about to check their procedures against this advice. Others again had written guidance on the implementation of processes to ensure alignment with Section 9's advice.

Such institutional guidance might be in the form of internal codes of practice which were reviewed and revised in line with sections of QAA's *Code of practice*.

30 In a small number of instances, audit reports recommended that institutions give further consideration to the advice contained in Section 9 of the *Code of practice*. One institution which had dismissed the section as not being relevant to its portfolio (which mainly consisted of postgraduate provision) was recommended to reconsider, given that a number of its master's students carried out projects in industry, away from the institution's campus. Other reports reflected inconsistencies in institutions' responses to this section of the *Code of practice*. One recommendation reflected concern that students seeking their own placement should be supported in the same way as those whose placements were managed by the institution.

### Approval, monitoring and review of programmes with a work-based learning element

31 A number of audit reports noted that the institutions concerned made special provision for monitoring the quality of placement provision within annual and periodic review processes. For example, students' experience of professional training and placement might be explicitly monitored, or feedback might be sought from placement providers and analysed. Alternatively, the institution's internal review process might require checks for compliance with relevant institutional policies, such as those governing communication with students and placement providers; these internal processes were often based on Section 9 of QAA's *Code of practice*. Further examples included extending such monitoring to service departments with a role in supporting placement students and other work-based learners, and cross-departmental reviews focused on employability. In some cases, institutions' periodic review processes might include consideration of the employability of graduates from individual programmes or suites of programmes.

32 In cases where there was significant use of placements or other forms of work-based learning, the resulting contacts offered both formal and informal mechanisms for seeking the views of employers on the employability of the institution's students. This aspect is considered separately and in more detail in another *Outcomes...* paper, on institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

33 Some audit reports indicated additional requirements for the approval of new programmes containing a placement element; for example, the views of placement providers might be reflected in the curriculum. More generally, internal institutional guidelines for approval might require reference to employability.

### Assessment of work-based learning

34 The audit reports noted that formal placement opportunities were normally assessed in some way and might contribute towards the award, or might lead to separate certification. Where learning attained through placements contributed to an award, the weight carried by such activity within the overall classification of a degree could and did vary both within and among institutions. One report, for example, noted that the institution did not provide central guidance on the weighting to be

given in the final classification decision to marks accrued in the course of placement learning. In this institution, one department had devised its own procedures, giving 'a weight of 10 per cent to [the placement year] and reducing the weight of the second year so as to leave the weight of the final year unchanged'. The same institution had also developed a separate award for those successfully completing industrial placements.

35 Other audit reports noted variability across institutions in the approaches their schools and departments took when awarding marks for work-based and placement learning, or changes that aimed to create greater uniformity in assessment weightings. In many cases, other forms of work-based learning were also assessed. This had increased with the introduction of Foundation Degrees.

36 The audit reports described a number of different approaches to the assessment of work-based learning, including portfolios and reports from employers. For assessment in the workplace, the assessor might be a member of the institution (for example, the placement tutor or equivalent), or an employer. In some institutions, a tutor and a work supervisor might jointly assess the student's performance. One report noted the need for advice on marking practices for those hosting placements, while another criticised a lack of employer involvement in assessment, with particular reference to Foundation Degrees.

37 Where the assessment contributed to an award it was subject to scrutiny by external examiners. One report noted positively the effort made to allow external examiners access to the workplace to facilitate this part of their duties.

### Conclusions

38 Taken together, the information in the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 demonstrates that opportunities for work-based learning are widespread in a variety of institutions and that, for the most part, students engaged in such learning are well prepared and supported. The audit reports identify 11 features of good practice in this area, with a particular focus on placement learning and embedding employability skills in the curriculum. There are only three recommendations, all primarily concerned with the need to ensure clear and consistent practice within the institution.

39 The report on work-based and placement learning in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers identified themes concerning:

- approaches to the introduction of work-based learning (including preparation and support for students and staff to undertake such learning)
- placement learning, with particular reference to responses to Section 9 of QAA's *Code of practice*
- arrangements for quality management
- assessment of learning outcomes in placements
- feedback from employers.

There is thus considerable similarity in the issues identified by audit teams. The exception is employability skills, which feature much more in this second set of audit reports.

## Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports

### Note

In the period covered by these papers a number of institutions underwent a variety of scrutiny procedures for taught degree awarding powers, university title and research degree awarding powers. Reports of the individual scrutiny processes were provided to QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers, and its Board of Directors, and formed the basis for advice to the Privy Council on the applications made by the respective institutions.

In most cases the scrutiny processes also provided information which, in the form of a bespoke report, QAA accepted as the equivalent of an institutional audit report. Only those reports which conform to the general pattern of the institutional audit reports are included in the list below.

### 2004-05

City University

Cranfield University

University of Hull

University of Leicester

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

University of Nottingham

The Queen's University of Belfast

University of Surrey

University of Ulster

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Queen Mary, University of London

Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (Royal Holloway, University of London)

University of London

University College London

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

University of Derby

De Montfort University

University of Gloucestershire

University of Hertfordshire  
Sheffield Hallam University  
University of Huddersfield  
Kingston University  
London Metropolitan University  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Liverpool John Moores University  
University of Luton<sup>1</sup>  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
Oxford Brookes University  
University of Plymouth  
Staffordshire University  
London South Bank University  
University of Sunderland  
University of Teesside  
University of East London  
University of the West of England, Bristol  
University of Westminster  
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College<sup>2</sup>  
Canterbury Christ Church University College<sup>3</sup>  
University of Chester  
Liverpool Hope University  
University College Winchester<sup>4</sup>  
Henley Management College  
Harper Adams University College  
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama  
American InterContinental University - London

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<sup>1</sup> Now the University of Bedfordshire

<sup>2</sup> Now Buckinghamshire New University

<sup>3</sup> Now Canterbury Christ Church University

<sup>4</sup> Now the University of Winchester

**2005-06**

University of Manchester

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

University of Bolton

Thames Valley University

University of Central England in Birmingham<sup>5</sup>

University of Worcester

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

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<sup>5</sup> Now Birmingham City University

## **Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions**

### **2004-05**

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

Henley Management College

Harper Adams University College

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American InterContinental University - London

### **2005-06**

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth



### **Appendix 3 - Titles of *Outcomes from institutional audit papers, Series 2***

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 20 sides of A4. Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers in the second series are listed below in provisional order of publication.

The first series of papers can be found on QAA's website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement)

#### **Title**

Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards

Progression and completion statistics

Learning support resources (including virtual learning environments)

Assessment of students

Work-based and placement learning, and employability

Programme monitoring arrangements

Arrangements for international students

Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Recruitment and admission of students

External examiners and their reports

Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports

Institutions' arrangements to support widening participation and access to higher education

Institutions' support for e-learning

Specialist institutions

Student representation and feedback

Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance

Staff support and development arrangements

Subject benchmark statements

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Programme specifications

Arrangements for combined, joint and multidisciplinary honours degrees programmes

The adoption and use of learning outcomes

Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review

The self-evaluation document in institutional audit

The contribution of the student written submission to institutional audit

Institutions' intentions for enhancement

Series 2: concluding overview

## Appendix 4 - Methodology

The analysis of the institutional audit reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England (2002)* to subdivide the Summary, Main report and Findings sections of the institutional audit reports into broad areas. An example from the Main report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text is taken from the report published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report is tagged with information providing the date the report was published and some basic characteristics of the institution ('base data'). The reports are then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR N6®. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an institutional audit report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings. It is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references are used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual *Outcomes...* papers are compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® are made available to authors to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams.

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